DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 119 EA 018 956

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TITLE Self-Renewal for Self-Preservation.
PUB DATE Aug 86
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration (40th, Flagstaff, AZ, August 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behaviorism; *Behavior Modification; Elementary Secondary Education; *Individual Development; Inservice Teacher Education; *Job Satisfaction; *Motivation; *Professional Development; Professional Personnel; *Self Actualization
IDENTIFIERS Herzberg (Frederick); Maslow (Abraham); *Professional Behavior; Theory X; Theory Y

ABSTRACT

This speech explores the concept of professional self-renewal. The presenter seeks to understand why some professionals always seem fresh, energetic, and ready for new challenges, whereas others are perpetually tired, bored, and irritated with the demands of their work. Referring to McGregor's management theories, the paper infers that Theory X people may find little satisfaction in their work and may perceive self-renewal as interference with their planned escape from work. Theory Y persons, on the other hand, probably find satisfaction both in their work and in self-renewal activities. The presenter views Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory in a behavioral context, recognizing that some individual actions result from external stimuli, rather than from inner need. Externally motivated individuals might pursue mandated activities like inservice education only for self-preservation and gain little from it. Frederick Herzberg's theory of hygienic factors (involving work conditions) versus motivational factors (involving the nature of work) may help explain why some people seek self-renewal and others avoid it. Those concerned with the work itself are renewing themselves whether working or playing. (MLH)

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SELF-RENEWAL FOR SELF-PRESERVATION

Presented by Dr. Walter E. Sistrunk
Professor of Educational Leadership
Mississippi State University

At
The Fortieth Annual Conference Of
The National Conference of Professors Of
Educational Administration
At
Northern Arizona University
Flagstaff Arizona
August 1986

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Some professional people seem always fresh, energetic, imaginative, and ready for new challenges. Other, seemingly similiar, professional people seem perpetually tired, bored, lacking in energy and imagination, frustrated, and irritated by the demands of their work. Some seem motivated to do a better job and indeed to enjoy their work while others seem to nearly always seek ways to avoid it. Some seem to seek a rut to sink into and then they work hard to wear it deeper and smoother throughout their professional lives. The reasons for such a dramatic difference in the way similiarly prepared professional people live and work could be many and could be very diverse and to some extent they no doubt are. The principal cause of this observed difference could be intelligence, education, training, character, personality type, compensation, colleagues, supervisors, ambition, opportunity, laziness, love or fear of adventure, and/or motivation/satisfaction. Perhaps some have risen beyond their level of competence or perhaps

some are McGregor's Theory X type while others are his Theory Y type.

It may be that no general explanation of why some seem always renewed while others seem seldom to be ready for new challenges can be made. It is possible that all the things listed above, and some others, enter into an equation that explains the phenomenon of professional freshness in some way.

The tentative conclusion has been reached that those people who are closer to McGregor's Theory Y type find satisfaction in doing their work well and satisfaction in self-renewal. Whereas, those people who are closer to McGregor's Theory X type may not find satisfaction in their work. Theory X people may perceive self-renewal as dull, boring, burdensome, and as interfering with their planned escape from work. Indeed, such people may dislike self- renewal because they are really not engaged with life and do not wish to be engaged with either life or work. I once knew a professor, for instance, who took every kind of informative seminar he could but none of it was for self renewal. He was practicing to be <u>old for at least 25 years</u> before he <u>actually</u> retired. Now, five years after retirement, he looks ten years younger and he <u>acts self-renewed</u>! The real difference between those who are refreshed by self-renewal activity and those who are merely irritated by it may lie in how they view work. Some may be motivated to work because they find the work <u>itself</u>

rewarding while others find only the conditions of work rewarding.

Most of us rely on Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a principal explanation of motivation. In other words, we tend to think that if a person's lower level needs are not met then that person will not pursue higher level needs to any great extent. Simple observation of the behavior of some extraordinary individuals indicates that this is not true for some people most of the time and that it is not true for numbers of people some of the time. Many professional people are also influenced by behaviorism. Consideration of the hierarchy of needs in a behavioral context can lead one to think of individual behavior as resulting from external stimuli rather than being prompted by some deep feeling from within the individual. Such a view of behavior is essentially pessimistic and leads at the minimum to a feeling of 'what's the use', others decide our fate anyway. People who have a view of life like the one just described engage in self-renewal for self-preservation because they feel that they must keep up or because their employer demands it. They do not expect to gain much from it and they do not. This is a narrow view of self- renewal dependent upon external forces as a means of motivating the professional to renew himself or herself. Such activity is usually called in-service education when it is done in the public schools. Little genuine self-renewal usually results from such mandated

activities since the reasons the individual does them are not deeply rooted in self-esteem.

Perhaps another reason why such activites result in little self-renewal was explained in the Kappan article about the in-servicing of Flossie the cow in the 1983 article.

Frederick Herzberg's work with motivation/satisfaction may have considerable relevance for highly educated professional people. His view that hygienic factors have only to do with the conditions of work whereas motivational factors have mainly to do with the nature of the work itself may go far toward explaining why some people want to be self-renewed while others avoid it.

People who enjoy the nature of their work and who are engaged with life literally find self-renewal in almost everything they do. They do not have to keep up! People have to keep up with them! Such people want to keep up. They self-renew continually. Most of them probably think very little about keeping up or self-renewing, except in retrospect. People who like the nature of their work are self-renewing all the time; but, they do not work all the time. They play as hard as they work; and, they are renewed by both work and play.

On the other hand, those who are mainly concerned with the conditions of work are not renewed by work. They play to escape work and they are rarely renewed by play either. Work stresses them and escape from it does not renew them. Such people usually engage in self renewal

activities only when they feel they must because they are interested only in the hygienic factors of their job. Such people need to be self-renewed for their own self-preservation and for the good of their students and institutions; but, they usually view self-renewal activities not as fun; but, as being as stressful as work.

We all need to be renewed, The question is what renews us. It seems possible that no activity renews some people and almost any activity renews some others.